



State of Connecticut
House of Representatives

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Representative Fleischman, Senator Stillman and members of the Education Committee, thank you for agreeing to hear testimony on House Bill 6421. The bill is similar in some respects to a bill I co-introduced with Rep. Hurlburt. That bill, House Bill 5380 also offers an alternate method of determining the appropriate allocation of the cost of a regional school district to member towns. These bills attempt to address a concern that I have heard expressed by the financial boards of towns which are members of regional school systems.

As you know, regional school boards adopt a budget through a process that is largely independent of sending town's fiscal authority. Once adopted, often through a referendum, the costs are allocated to towns based on the number of students each member town sends to the school.

As a consequence, each member town's contribution changes not just by the percentage of increase in the regional school budget, but also by the percentage change in the student population. In small districts, even a small change in the number of students can lead to a large change in a member town's contribution. These dramatic changes are difficult to anticipate, and tough to absorb in a single year.

Let me offer an example. This year, in Regional School District #19, the budget proposal currently under consideration would increase spending by 3.2%. (This is the Superintendent's proposal and it has not been adopted by the school board.) The budget increase is allocated according to enrollment. However, while Ashford's enrollment has decreased by 6 students, and Mansfield's has decreased by 16 students, Willington's has increased by 18 students.

The net result is that when the bill for the school system comes, Ashford's contribution will increase by .1% and Mansfield's will increase by .6%. Willington's contribution to the school district will increase by 9.6%.

I represent Mansfield and while I am pleased that Mansfield's taxpayers will benefit from the current allocation model this year, I know that if history repeats itself, we'll find ourselves in Willington's shoes shortly.

If regional school districts volunteered to use a rolling average as described in the bill before you, year over year changes would be mitigated. Changes in school enrollments would still lead to changes in the allocations, but increases and decreases would be reflected over a longer period of time. Some towns may pay less, others may pay more in any given year. However, I think that over time, a town's contribution would likely even out and be very similar to the amount paid using the current model.

There is one important difference between the bill before you and the version I submitted as a proposed bill. I proposed that any alternative allocation method be offered as an option for regional school districts and their member towns to voluntarily adopt. In towns with stable enrollments or with long-term trends that favor one town over another, using a rolling average may be undesirable. Each district is different and elected officials should be permitted to decide whether to use an alternate method based on the circumstances of their school district.